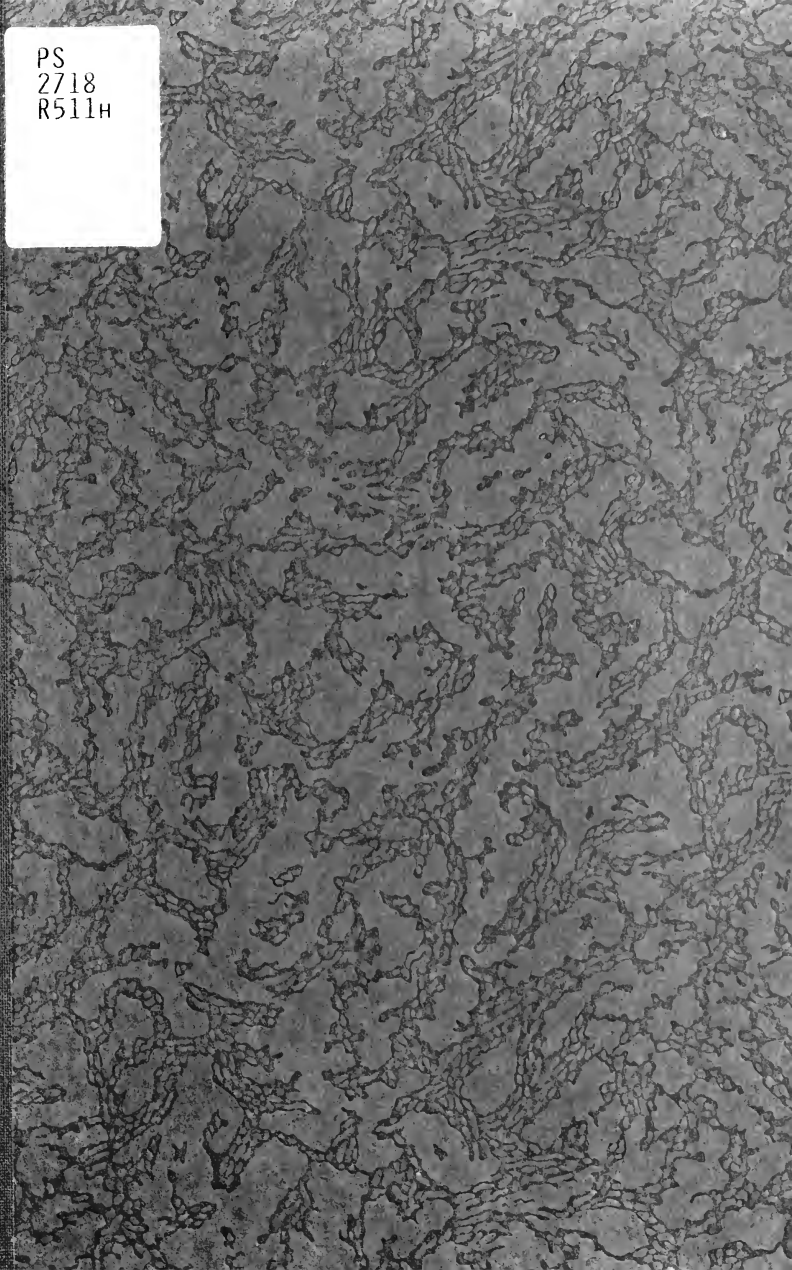
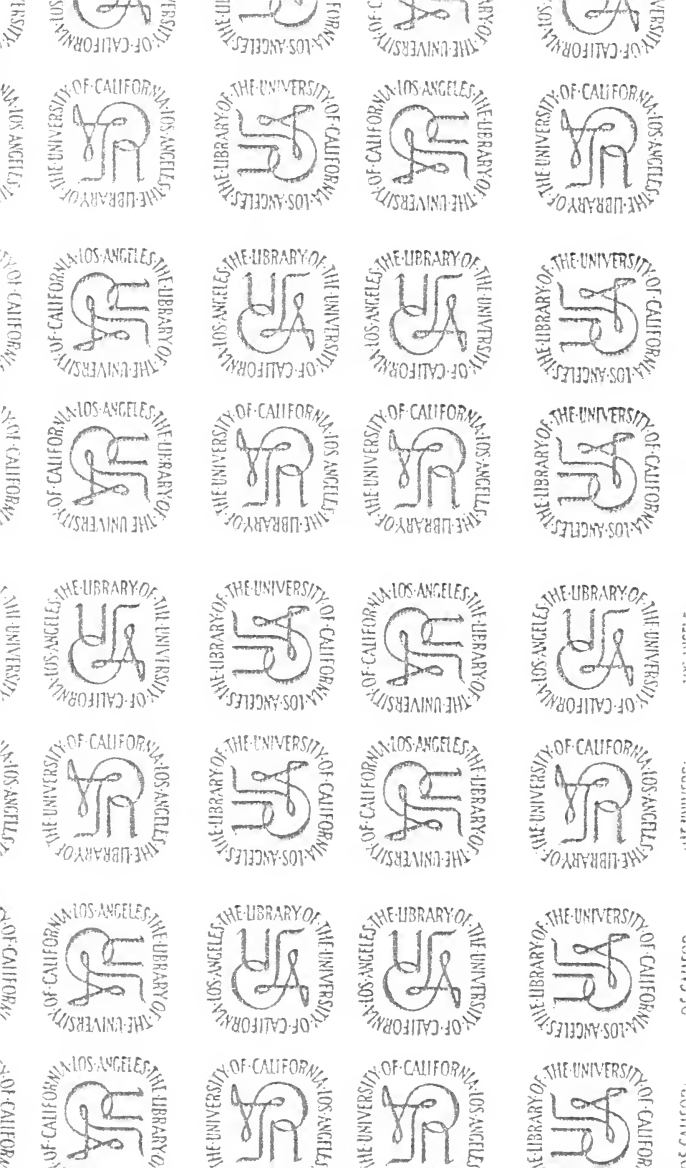


PS
2718
R511H





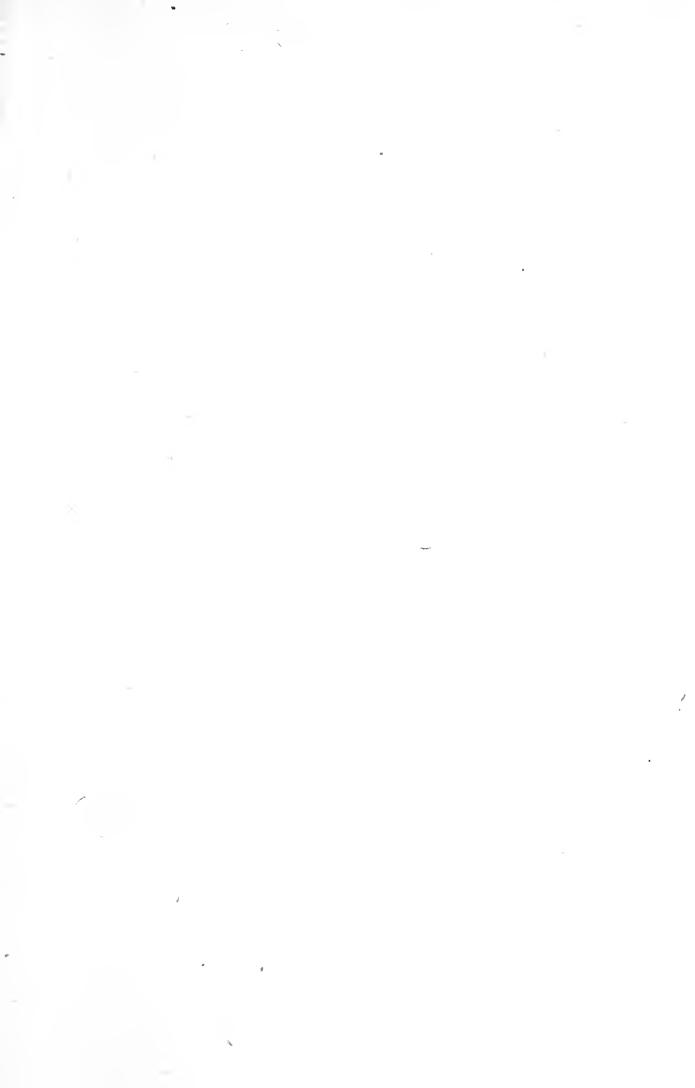
To Paul Hull:

There is only one of you,
Paul, and I am glad you have
lived in my time.

John Ritchie.



Hassan.



HASSAN.

A VISION OF THE DESERT.

BY

JOHN RITCHIE.



CHICAGO:

F. J. SCHULTE & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,
298 DEARBORN ST.

Copyright, 1892,
By FRANCIS J. SCHULTE.
All rights reserved.

PS
2718
R511h

Hassan.

GOD REIGNS! In desolate splendor lay the waste
That, like a fiery scar seared wantonly
By errant sun, lies broad across the brow
Of Africa. Amid the yellow silence,
A withered fig tree thrust its shriveled limbs
Aloft, and into the scant umbrage crept,
From the full flush of noonday's fervid glow,
A wounded Arab. Round the shrunken stem
His tawny body sinuously curled,
And harshly, from between white teeth in agony
Unlipped, his wild thanks dragged their guttural course
For this poor shelter. Not for self alone.—
Muffled by swathing folds of burnous, torn
And stained, that ever in tender clasp he bore,
A puling cry uprose, and, in his pain,
With rueful joy his swart face overshone;
For sweeter savor than the parent love
Immortal never knew. Out where the glare
In snaky coils writhed up, his horse, with flank
Collapsing, flaccid neck outstretched, and by
Eternal numbness smit, the tongue, that lolled
Unshrinking on the burning sand. No more
In wingèd flight was he from fell pursuit
To bear his periled lord—no more forever!

Hassan.

Eons ago; before the Prophet—aye!
Ere Father Ishmael, Abraham's sinister seed,
O'er thirsty Paran roamed—so ran the old
Legend among the Shaanbah—lived a Sheikh
Of courage high and valor so approved,
The desert-dwellers of twin continents
His glorious deeds in sounding rhythm sang
From Western Syrtis to the farthest lunge
Of Ras el Hada. At his death—'twas when
With sinewy hands he rived a lion's jaws
That, sanguine, trapped his eldest born, nor recked
The stealthy mate—the hoary tribal seers
Foretold the coming of a greater Hassan.
In the sonorous stillness of the night,
Through sequent generations, their wise men,
Wandering, scanned the planetary aspects
In practice of a rude astrology
That, oft deceiving, oft renewed their hope.
Nor unattended was their patient watch
With dim foreboding and perplexity,
For in the theme were Lords of houses Eight
And Three in mystic union joined. At last
The glittering oracles of the sky proclaimed
The time was full. In expectation mute,
His swarthy bandits, closer circling, drew
About their leader's tent, and ere the line
Meridional was passed, glad cries announced
The hero's birth.

For him the sapient elders chose a bride
With lineage that shamed not his own.
He loved her as the tiger loves his barred
And supple mate; and she, in turn, loved him

Hassan.

With reverence, meek, submissive — as becomes
An Arab's consort. Time flowed on, and soon
His sire, in course of nature ripe in years,
Followed his fathers to their humble tomb.
Hassan, in uncontrolled authority,
Set out to prove by deed his star-sworn fortune.
Fierce as the simoon's whirling blast, he scourged
The desert routes, and, ever leading on
His truculent followers, swept with grim
Destruction through the Tuareg country, where
The Tibbou cringed before his battle-yell,
And once, by shifting dune, o'er mountain range,
Plateau eroded, e'en to far Soudan.

Gauging all greatness by heroic feat
Of arms, as is the custom of his race,
He inward knew that, swol'n as was his fame,
It failed achieving aught that by compare
O'ertopped the towering glory of his great
Ancestor; and, not meanly envious,
Though by a generous emulation fired,
He feared he his high destiny in some
Particular betrayed. Rapine and war
His recreation were, but, lofty aim
Inspiring him, he strove with none save man
Grasping his arms, or riotous beast that sheared
Its bloody swath athwart the tribal flocks.
Infant, the helpless spawn of foe, with him
Was safe, and round his helpmeet's dandling knees
A fringe of captive children grew. For this,
When urged by murderous kinsmen to destroy,
He brief excused himself with haughty claim
Devout, that "Blindness still their eyes obscured."

Hassan.

Islam for mercy the pretext gave—undreamed
By him what his spouse knew, that in his soul,
Ungermine, lay the seed of sacrifice.

To them a man-child came. Him the proud Sheikh
Worshiped with an idolatry that rose
To equal stature with his Meccan faith.
When, in the languorous tropic day, supine,
He throned the palpitating minim on
His breast, and felt about his pliant face
The velvety touch of pulpy fingers, hotly
Engaged in puny conflict with his beard,
And listened to its inarticulate purl—
Of human accents the earliest, and nearest
To the unvoiced melody of voiced words—
Then was the red light in his eye seduced
To softer radiance, and the witching unrest
That haunted him retired. Hassan loved him
So strong that, breaking usage of the tribe—
Who, bent on robbery, leave their broods intrenched
By vastnesses of arid sand—he, when
On distant razzia, took his heir and mate.

One woeful night—may it ever stand accurst!—
Returning slackly, eastward of Ghadamès,
Laden with plunder seized in mid-Fezzan—
Among the living spoils a child that slept
And suckled with his own—Hassan drew rein
On laboring barb and patient mahry, pitching
His sable hair-tents where the Hammada
El Homra spreads its dolorous bosom.
Darkness, immeasurable and starless, clothed
The isolated camp in ebon fog,

Hassan.

And voice of Jinn, elusive, calling hoarse
To answering Jinnee, echoed hollow through
The gloom. On even poise the eerie night
Hung trembling to its lapse toward dawn, when — hark !
Was it mere rustle of the desert air ?
Or monstrous flight of monstrous birds ? No ! No !
“ The Tuareg ! The Tuareg ! ” Shrill pealed th’ alarm,
And quick from ruffled tents the shrill response.
First of his people, Hassan sprang from sleep
Full-armed and furious as a lioness
New-ravened of her whelps. ’Twas fate ! As when
Great Ocean in his crested anger shoots
A green and shaggy hand o’er Guinea’s coast
In chaos drear, a strident front, incurved,
Tumultuous, surged through the waking camp,
To burst in percolating spray, whose each
And every horrid point was nimble murder !
Ferociously, the braver few fought on
Till death their limbs relaxed. The hero saw
Them fall, and cravens fly, as fly sere leaves
Before Sirocco’s lash. Alone he stood,
Dim focus of a hundred hungry spears,
Undaunted. “ Yield, Arab, and mercy take ! ”
Scornful and proud, the answer came : “ Never,
From Tuareg dogs ! ” Ere the wild death-scream chilled
The listening night, a timorous plaint struck down
The valorous warrior in him and awoke
His father heart. With instant plunge he shattered
The bristling hedge, and from a level tent
Drew out the wailing infant. Prompt to call,
His murmuring steed responded, and, red-carved
With many a gash, he rode away. The tribe
Yet tell with pride and sadness how he rode : —



Hassan.

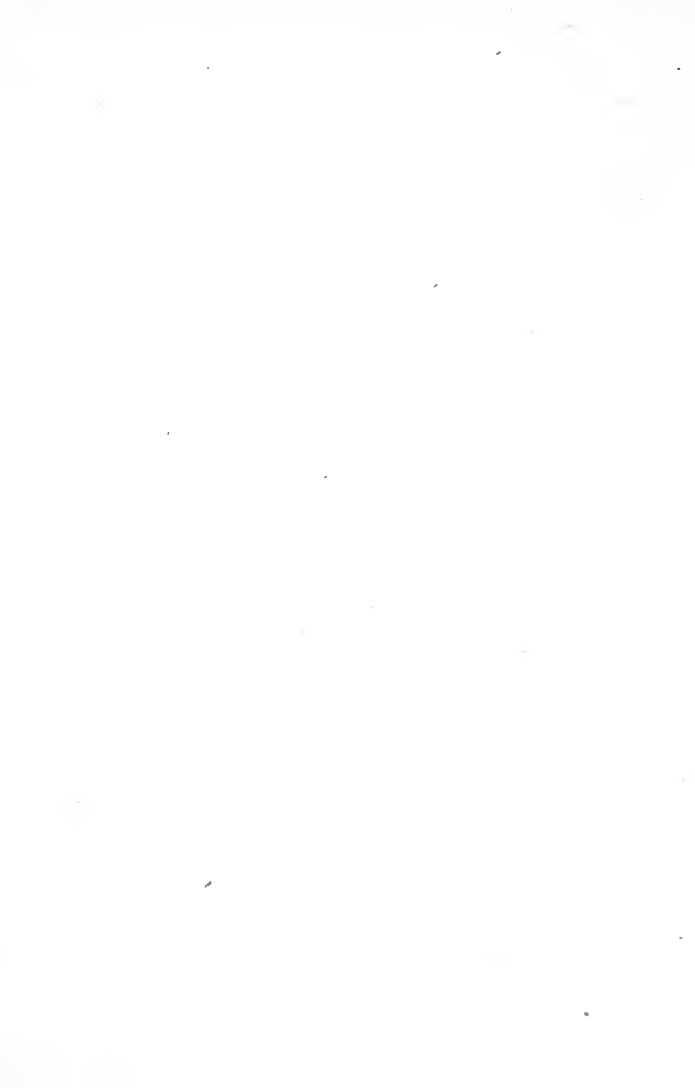
Out of the noxious fumes of fight, over
The Hammada, shimmering red from pent-up glare
Of day released ; swift as Al Borak in flight
Through the blue, into the murky distance far,
Into the cavernous West ; league into league
Gliding continuous, through night's last hours,
Through iridescent dawn, through gathering glow
Of Afric's torrid morn — like ride ne'er held
Sahara's marvelous story. And, with voice
Fall'n low and soft — which, to their ruthless hearts,
Can never be explained — they tell how, grimed
With curdled gore, and every membrane shrunk
And fiercely clamorous from scourging thirst,
He smote back pleading nature and denied
The prayers of his own grievous hurts, but, when
The babe its weak remonstrance urged, he, from
A timely water-vessel, laved its chapped
And grumous lips until the whistling gourd
Confessed it held no more.

And now, in utmost loneliness, and sore
Anguish, he, lovingly and covetous,
Threw back the clinging folds to glad his eyes
With sight of his first-born. Beard of Allah !
'Twas the captive ! Before him passed a vision
That wrung his savage heart. He saw his own
Sweet innocent, foul-spiked on griding spear,
Each severed artery spouting crimson sap,
And all the little fingers intertwined
In agony — a grisly apparition
Burning through shuddering mist that drifted by
In separate particles ! Sick with heart-pain
And gluttonous of blood, his ranging eye



Hassan.

Fell on the child. Hot as hell's lava, hate
In whitest fury fused his soul. As on
A quailing hare the red-eyed eagle swoops,
He seized and swung on high the gasping victim,
And, with a rasping utterance that tore
His crusted throat, he raised the terrible cry —
“Revenge!”—such awful joy vibrating him
As shook the mighty Danite when, within
His lethal arms, he gathered the deep-sunk
Pillars of Gaza's temple, and whelmed
Her multitudes in shrieking ruin — he
Content with death thereat. Yet once again,
Shrill as triumphant yell of wallowing fiend
Forever damned clutching a fresh-won soul,
Into the tremulous ether soaring, rushed
The far-flung scream — “Revenge!” In bitter glee
He laughed — and never lank hyena, squat
Low at Algerian funeral gate,
Such dismal ululation dragged from his
Foul pipe — laughed horribly, so horribly
That in the stress and throe of it he oped
The undiscovered founts that fed his wounds,
And, gurgling, blew, full in the infant's face,
A ruddy spume, which, wrung by sorest thirst,
It eager lapped, and, pursing its poor mouth,
Upraised a feeble wail, as to its dam,
For more of the scarlet nourishment. The cruel
Barbarian stayed his hand, and curiously
Surveyed the piteous tragedy — for even
Scowling Doom hath a speculative vein ;
And as he gazed upon the writhing face,
By some mysterious transmutation, it,
To his delirious eye, the semblance took



Hassan.

That graced his own lost floweret. Swift passed
The image, yet, when he again essayed
The vengeful act, his arm refused its office.
A soul in wrestle with Omnipotence ! —
For, at command of Infinite Pity, from
Sweet Mercy's chalice flowed a pregnant drop,
That, by the unsearchable alchemy Divine,
Straightway so leavened his torpid heart with sense
Of older brotherhood, that Love reclaimed
The throne usurped by racial hatred — love
So rich it well-nigh cloyed. He saw, and saw
But darkly yet, like one new-come to Truth
And by her gleaming purity dazzled. This
He knew : With love ineffable was all
His soul enrapt. Sharper than sharpest pang
That lanced his lacerated body, pierced
The husky rattle of the infant's breath.
For friend, for foe, he sought, to hold the young
Life in. From near to far — far out where crouched
The dim horizon — over all the vast
And undulating solitude, naught moved.
In him, in him alone, was aid — in him
And God ! Love called to consecration.
Nature, yet strong within him, at the last
Awoke, and the hot love he bore the desert
Swelled to fiery speech and passionate gesture :
“ Ye naked rocks ! Ye sun-kissed sands ! I loved thee !
Ye isles of green ! Ye fountains of sweet waters !
Allah Taala ! how I loved thee ! In life,
In death — aye ! know that in the world of shades
I loved thee ! Allah is great ! — It was predestined ! ”

Hassan.

Then, in the brooding stillness, the sacrament
Was wrought. In the spirit of Him who suffered
The tender buds of Jewry on His breast
To lie, he took the drooping lamb within
His arms, and from his wasting channels gave
It life. On him the hollow void came down,
And, rending, lifted, rolling its yellow shell
In distant scroll, receding ; and he, merged
In the mingling eternities, scarce knew
Whether the lapping of the little tongue
Were joyous plash of fountain flowing cool
In palm-tree shade, or music of choral reeds
By the rivers of Paradise, that on his ear
Fell soft as echo of an evening prayer.
Gently as summer cloud in crystal sky
Dissolves, the soul of Hassan passed ; nor knew
This thing that he had done was greater far
Than aught, or all, the elder Hassan did !

Lone atom drowned in starved immensity !
Desert deserted — nay ! on every hand,
As by the Heavenly choir, eternal, ranged
In rank on rank around the Throne, the air
Thrilled sweetly resonant with countless flight
Of seraphim on silvery pinion borne ;
That sudden ceased, as if all, listening, heard
The Voice Omnipotent, from measureless deep
To deep, roll in reverberations large :
“ Fate, Providence, Condition, Race, are mere
Titles of My will — I, even I, am All ;
And like to these, My children, all are linked
In everlasting kinship ; not on earth
Alone, but through the rimless space, where suns

Hassan.

And worlds innumerable obedient heave
Their heavy globes. Nor do I hold in scorn
Small creed or thought, for each exists in true
Adjustment to allotted nature — I,
And I alone, am lastly Judge !”

A silent shadow, ever-wheeling, swept
Its growing longitude in august march
O'er drifted sands around the lonely
Sanctuary ; round blasted tree and round
The human mold, within whose rigid palm
Lay one brown hand of the babe who slept beside
His elder brother. Through unchanging calm
Full-rounded Hours in still procession one
The other trailed, and Day, grown old, drew nigh
To Evening. Wrapped in coronal robes of fire
Voluminous, the Sun yet lingered, loth
To leave with dim-eyed Night his sacred ward.

Out of the East a band of warriors came —
Sahara's human wolves. All day they followed
The slot o'er crumbling rock and yielding sand,
And now, with grating crush of horses' hoofs,
With rattle of spear and clash of scimeter,
Circling the small God's-acre, grimly viewed
The ruin sublime. Unto their desert sense,
As it were writ in letters of living fire,
The dire recital glowed ; and they, who came
With furious hate to slay, felt moving at
Their hearts a strange compassion. Rarely touched,
With reverent hands they gave him sepulture,
That, in accordance with their faith, his soul
Might know the fullness of immortal joy.

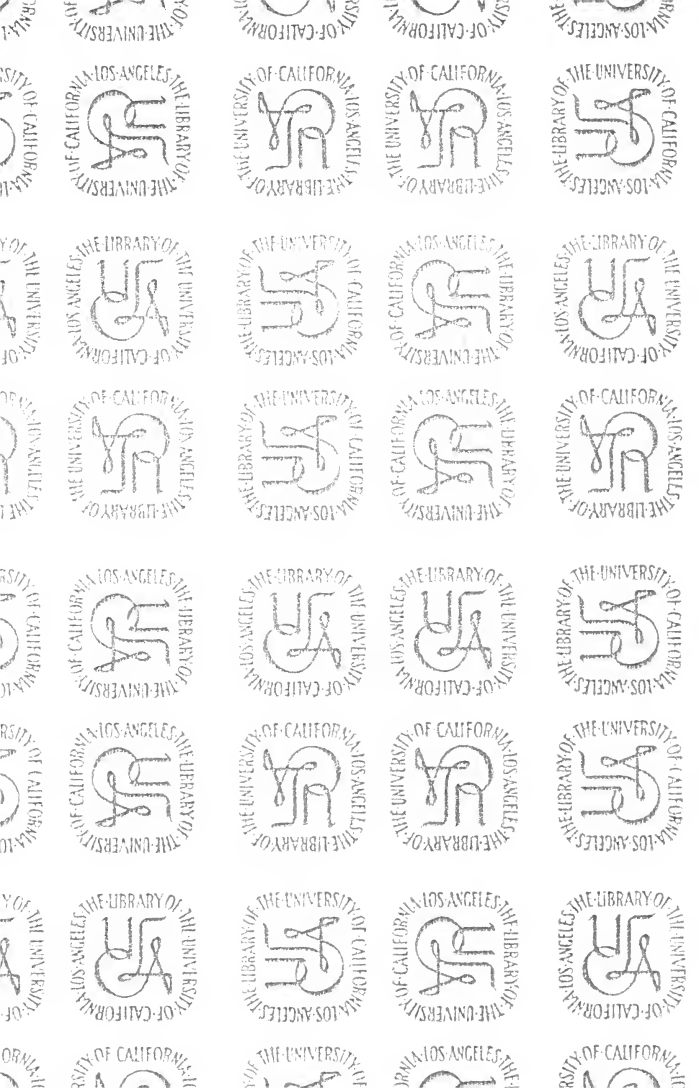
Hassan.

Where he lay they buried him, wondering
With equal wonder that their rancorous foe
Should for an enemy lay down his life,
As well that they, who never pity gave,
Gave pity unto him. While they at one
Another gazed, a solemn hush on them
Descended, and unseen, save by Its work,
Before their starting eyes the awful Hand
Creative moved. The leprous bark with new
Life thrilled ; along its ancient conduits coursed
The singing sap, and trunk and branch and twig
Their cylinders in fullest contour drew.
In emerald beauty nascent foliage sprang
To view, bending in graceful homage before
The God who called it into being. Buds,
New-born, expanding, burst, unfolding blooms
That wide diffused their balmy redolence,
And withered but to herald pendent fruit
Which riped its purple succulence, embossed
On shield of green. From a perennial fount
A tinkling rivulet ran o'er pebbly reach,
Bubbling its joy in liquid melody,
Re-echoing sweet from guardian banks fresh-draped
With trailing vines in tangled maze enmeshed,
And starred with flowers that shyly blushed, or blazed
In haughty splendor on the beryl slopes.
Against the glowing sky, in outer range,
Were lofty palms, rearing their burnished crowns
In simple majesty, about whose knees
Dew-jeweled grasses clustered thick, curling
Their delicate lengths luxuriant, and all
The moist interstices exhaled the breath
Of humid earth ; while from the tabernacle

Hassan.

Above floated the rippling song of birds,
Where song of bird was never heard before.
As Moussa from the burning bush retired,
The Imoshagh drew back, and, with new thoughts,
In meditation went their way in peace.

Years trod on years, and now, at even-tide
The straggling caravan finds there the rest
It seeks, and bearded merchants on their mats,
Praying with grave faces to the East, give thanks
To Allah for the sacrifice. And when
The night-wind from the desert gently blows,
Stirring the tree to murmurous speech, among
The world of voices, one, that none but true
Believer hears, will softly whisper, "I AM HASSAN!"





3 1158 01319 4005

